National Child=s Study
Initial Proposal for Core Hypothesis/Question

Proposed Question: Can we establish and sustain community health partnerships through meaningful inclusion of the community into the development, design, and decision-making processes of a health research project? Also, can we encourage participation and retention in the project through the partnerships and demonstrate true benefit to the community such that we leave behind an infrastructure which will facilitate future research efforts?

Workgroup: **Community Outreach and Communications**

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[*When we use the word community we are using it in the broadest sense, it is meant to include all levels, i.e., residents, schools, businesses, worship centers, and local governments etc.*]

Public Health Significance: Researchers have provided evidence to support the notion that the social environment in which people live, as well as their lifestyles and behaviors, can influence the incidence of illness within a population. They have also demonstrated that a population can achieve long-term health improvements when people become involved in their community and work together to effect change.

In light of these developments it would be advantageous and prudent to expand our efforts to support strong community collaboration into our study design. By understanding community attitudes and beliefs and by taking advantage of community resources, researchers can simultaneously address multiple health risk factors. Inclusion of communities in public health policy and decision -making processes empowers communities and gives them a sense of commitment to the process. Therefore, improving communities rate of participation in health promotion or research activities, which should ultimately improve community health and disease prevention efforts.

If NCS works closely with state and local health departments, state education agencies, and national and community -based organizations, these entities can be key partners, and conduits through which promising research findings can be translated into practical, cost-effective research programs and applied at the community level. NCS=s inclusion of targeted study communities in the development of this study will hopefully improve community commitment to the study and retain them over the life of the study.

Scientific Merit: Findings in the literature have helped to shed light on why community involvement is useful and how we can engage people to most effectively address public health issues. There are a number of concepts that guide approaches to successful community engagement. What we learn from our study will enhance and perhaps even clarify research that has already been done and will help to lay a foundation for community involvement in future research studies. Again the long term outcome is to improve public health.

Implementation/Feasibility: I truly belief that everything the Community Outreach & Communications workgroup wants to do is feasible, however there are a number of extremely complex issues to address. Therefore, even though it may seem unnecessary to say, the success of this study is going to depend on extremely careful well thought-out actions. So bearing that in mind we offer the next three preliminary steps.

1) To avoid Are-inventing the wheel@ we do feel some time should be spent in researching past community-based research efforts and identifying what worked and what didn=t work. Also, look at current or ongoing community-based research projects. It may be possible to partner with established community health partnerships, or at least garner support from entities respected and trusted by the communities.

2) We will need contractor support to survey and evaluate the social structure, beliefs, and behaviors of our targeted communities once they are identified. We then will need contractor support to determine the most appropriate instruments to use to identify the characteristics of our targeted communities.

3) Once we have a better understanding of our study targets, we will need to develop a communication strategy appropriate for that group which identify how best to communicate with them, and how we can best address their needs and concerns as they provide their input to the process. And most of all we want to understand how best to recruit and retain individuals in the study.

Barriers we may encounter include but are not limited to;
        * Privacy issues related to the type and volume of information that might be collected
        * Community attitudes about the government
        * Community and governmental turf battles
        * Possible mobility issues with study subjects
        * Cultural/language/social issues
        * Science versus moral/spiritual beliefs

If community involvement is to be meaningful, we do need to engage the community in the process as soon as possible, even with the preliminary planning and development that is being done now, we need to allow enough flexibility to allow for community input later as the target communities are identified.